

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 3

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR
13 February 1985

Walters's posting to UN spotlights behind-the-scenes diplomat

By George D. Moffett III
Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

Washington

The nomination of Vernon A. Walters to succeed Jeane J. Kirkpatrick as US ambassador to the United Nations brings to light a career long respected in diplomatic circles but, until now, largely hidden from public view.

If he is confirmed by the US Senate, Mr. Walters will bring to the UN a distinct change of style from his controversial predecessor. But his views are almost certain to please conservatives.

"Kirkpatrick is a hard act to follow," says Burton Pines, a foreign policy specialist at the conservative Heritage Foundation, a public-policy research group in Washington, D.C. "It's like coming from a month in Bermuda to a vacation in the Catskills. But Walters has enough international experience to be solid."

Even so, there are indications that Walters's confirmation process may not be trouble-free. Although his nomination is not expected to encounter any major resistance, Walters's close ties to military leaders and intelligence figures around the world may raise questions at the coming confirmation hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

"Walters has been a specialist in the darker side of diplomacy," says one source familiar with his career. "His confirmation puts his career in the window of

publicity. It may be the occasion for a surprising amount of controversy."

For some years, Walters has been the subject of allegations of possible negligence or cover-up in events surrounding the 1976 assassination of former Chilean Ambassador Orlando Letelier, and of possible complicity in the 1964 overthrow of Brazilian President Joao Goulart.

Questions may also be raised about allegations made in a 1978 article in World Politics that as military attaché in Rome, Walters strongly urged the deployment of US marines to prevent socialists from joining an Italian coalition government.

Committee members may also use the hearings as an occasion to look deeper into Walters's position during the Watergate affair. As deputy director of the CIA during the Nixon administration, Walters rebuffed overtures made by Nixon aides H. R. Haldeman and John Dean III to use the CIA as part of the Watergate cover-up. In a book on Watergate, former Nixon aide John Ehrlichman charges that Walters's account of his own role was an "example of selective recollection."

In addition, Walters is reported to have had misgivings about the UN in the past, though he says he now views the organization as necessary.

Trading on his aptitude for foreign languages (he reportedly speaks eight, plus several dialects), Walters has built a career as a behind-the-scenes troubleshooter. By his own account he has traveled to more than 100 countries and logged more than 1 million miles for President Reagan alone. His memoirs, published several years ago, detail a career interwoven with the major events and personalities of the cold war.

Walters attributes his success to a rule made famous by former Secretary of State George C. Marshall that there's no limit to what you can accomplish in Washington if you're willing to let someone else have the credit.

Despite his willingness to operate away from the limelight, he has risen from the

rank of private to highly decorated three-star Army general. Along the way he served as translator, aide, and adviser to five US presidents, from Truman to Reagan.

Walters is no stranger to the Foreign Relations Committee, where he has appeared for confirmation hearings five times before. The committee will find a nominee known more for bluntness than academic polish, a man of conservative views with a gregarious personality and a demonstrated preference for operating behind the scenes. Walters has also established a reputation for discretion and loyalty — but not blind loyalty.

He takes over at a time when the US — together with Israel and South Africa — are increasingly isolated from the Arab, African, and nonaligned UN blocs. While expected to carry on Mrs. Kirkpatrick's strong anti-Soviet views, Walters is considered less likely to operate with Kirkpatrick's independence.

Partly because of the Kirkpatrick experience, Secretary of State George P. Shultz is known to favor downgrading the office of UN ambassador from its current Cabinet-rank status. At a press conference last week, Walters said it was his "understanding that the position is the same as it was in the case of my predecessor." However the question of rank is settled, Walters is known to have Shultz's strong support.